

60130-1669
02MRA0574**IN THE SPECIFICATION**

Please amend paragraph 3 as follows:

In some vehicle configurations tandem axles are provided but only a single axle is driven. The tandem axles include a single driven axle connected by way of a main drive shaft to an engine of the truck. The non-driven axle, known in the art as a tag axle, may be disposed behind the driven axle to support a portion of the trailer weight. Tag axles are used in many different vehicle applications including large trucks towing cargo trailers and buses utilizing ~~two~~ rear axles.

Please amend paragraph 9 as follows:

The tag axle assembly of the present invention includes an axle housing constructed of rectangular plate members. A torque plate is attached as the end plate of the housing. The axle housing assembly includes the torque plate ~~to eliminate~~ thereby eliminating the joint between the torque plate and the housing.

Please amend paragraph 24 as follows:

Referring to Figure 1, a motor vehicle 10 includes a front axle and tandem rear axles. Typically, the two rear axles at least partially support the load of a trailer (not shown). An engine 18 rotates a drive shaft 16 that drives a driven axle 14 disposed adjacent a rearward segment of the motor vehicle 10. The motor vehicle 10 includes a non-driven tag axle assembly 12 disposed between the engine 18 and the driven axle 14. Because the tag axle assembly 12 is disposed between the driven axle 14 and the ~~motor~~ engine 18 the drive shaft 16 must extend through or under the tag axle assembly 12.

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Please amend paragraph 25 as follows:

Referring to Figure 2, a first segment 36 of the tag axle assembly 12 includes ~~an~~ axle housing 20 supporting a spindle assembly 46. The spindle assembly 46 is welded to the axle housing 20 at weld 58. Attached to the axle housing 20 and mounted to a torque plate 50 are a brake assembly 22 and hub assembly 24. The brake assembly 22 and hub assembly 24 are as known to a worker skilled in the art. It is within the contemplation of this invention that any configuration brake assembly and hub assembly known to a worker skilled in the art can be used and is dependent ~~only on the application's~~ application specific requirements.

Please amend paragraph 26 as follows:

Referring to Figure 3, the axle housing 20 includes a front plate 28 and a rear plate 30. The front plate 28 and rear plate 30 are attached to each other and spaced a distance apart by a top plate 26. The top plate 26 extends between the front and back plates 28,30 to form the generally rectangular axle housing 20. The ~~rectangular~~ axle housing 20 includes an overall inverted U-shaped configuration. The inverted U-shaped configuration of the axle housing 20 provides for the drive shaft 16 to extend between the motor 18 and driven axle 14.

Please amend paragraph 27 as follows:

Referring to Figure 4, the tag axle assembly 12 is shown without the brake assembly 22 and hub assembly 24 to provide further clarity on the construction of the axle housing 20. The axle housing 20 includes the front and rear plates 28,30 and also includes the torque plate 50. The torque plate 50 is preferably an integral portion of the axle housing 20 and provides for the mounting of the braking assembly 22. The torque plate 50 is welded in place with at least a portion of the thickness of the torque plate 50 disposed within a space defined between the front and rear plates 28, 30.

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Please amend paragraph 28 as follows:

The torque plate 50 includes a central opening 54. The central opening 54 provides for the spindle assembly 46 to extend there through. A spindle housing 48 of the spindle assembly 46 is attached to the axle housing 20. The spindle housing 48 becomes the bottom portion of the axle housing 20. The torque plate 50 includes flanges 52 for mounting of the brake assembly 22. Each of the flanges 52 includes openings 56 for brake assembly fasteners. The openings 56 may be threaded to correspond to threads of the fasteners used to mount the brake assembly 22.

Please amend paragraph 29 as follows:

Referring to Figures 6-8, construction of the axle housing 20 includes the attaching of the front plate 28 to ~~the~~ top plate 26 and ~~the~~ back plate 30 also attached to the top plate 26. A bottom plate 32 is disposed to cover areas that are not covered by the spindle assembly 46. The bottom plate 32 is welded between the front and back plates 28,30. The axle housing 20 in a semi-assembled position includes an open end 66 for receiving the torque plate 50. The axle housing 20 also includes an open bottom portion 68 for receiving the spindle assemblies 46.

Please amend paragraph 30 as follows:

Referring to Figures 9 and 10, a portion of the final assembly of the tag axle assembly 12 is shown. Figure 9 shows the tubular axle assembly 4240 and the axle housing 20. The spindle assembly 46 is preferably a portion of an existing standard tubular axle assembly 40. The tubular axle assembly 40 includes spindle assemblies 46 at each end, but only a hollow tubular member extending therebetween. The use of an existing standard tubular axle assembly 40 common to those already used for trailer applications decreases the expense and eliminates special fabrication of parts for the tag axle assembly 12.

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Please amend paragraph 31 as follows:

Welds 58 and 60 secure the tubular axle assembly 40 and torque plate 50 to the axle housing 20. As is shown in Figure 9, at this stage in assembly the entire tubular axle ~~housing~~assembly 40 is attached to the axle housing 20. Using the entire tubular axle assembly 40 provides for alignment of each of the spindle assemblies 46 relative to each other with minimal gauging and/or fixturing. After attachment of the torque plate 50 and the tubular axle assembly 40 to the axle housing 20 a center portion 62 of the tubular axle assembly 40 is removed to provide the final overall inverted U-shape of the tag axle assembly 12.

Please amend paragraph 32 as follows:

Integration of the torque plate 50 with the axle housing 20 minimizes complicated highly stressed and expensive mounting and fasteners. Further, the alignment provided by the use of the tubular axle assembly 40 decreases expense and improves manufacturing efficiency.

Please amend paragraph 33 as follows:

Referring to Figure 11, a method of this invention includes the steps of fabricating an axle housing 20 by attaching a front and back sheet of material to a top sheet and a bottom sheet to form a generally rectangular axle housing and cross section. The axle housing includes an inverted U-shape to provide for the drive shaft 16 to extend between the ~~motor~~engine and driven axle at the rear of the vehicle 10. The tubular axle assembly 40 is provided and the torque plate 50 is attached to each end of the tubular axle assembly 40.

Please amend paragraph 34 as follows:

The axle housing 20 and the tubular axle assembly 40 that includes both torque plates 50 and spindle housing assemblies 47 at each end are then combined into one intermediate assembly. The tubular axle assembly 40 is welded to the axle housing 20. The torque plate 50 is welded to the axle housing 20.

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Please amend paragraph 35 as follows:

The method also includes the steps of aligning the spindle assemblies 46 at each end of the axle housing 20 by way of the tubular axle assembly 40. Alignment of the torque plates 50 and spindle assembly 46 relative to each other is simplified by the attachment of the single tubular axle assembly 40 that extends from the first and second ends of the axle housing 20. Upon completion of the welding of the torque plate 50 and spindle ~~housing~~assemblies 46 to the axle housing 20 the center portion of the tubular axle assembly 40 is removed. The center portion 62 is removed to provide the overall configuration desired for the completed axle housing assembly 12.

Please amend paragraph 37 as follows:

This method includes the torque plate 50 forming an end segment of the axle assembly 40 to minimize inefficient and highly stressed joints previously required to support spindle assemblies at each end of an axle housing. In addition, the tubular axle assembly 40 is used to align each of the spindle assemblies 46 at distal segments of the axle housing 20. The alignment function of the tubular axle assembly 40 eliminates inefficient and relatively costly fixturing and manufacturing steps. The complete axle housing assembly 20 includes improved alignment between spindle assemblies 46 disposed on each end of the axle housing assembly 20 and a strengthened joint without highly stressed fasteners.